DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 204 955 EC 133 526

AUTHOR Jacobson, William H.
TITLE Providing Orientation and Mobility Instruction in Public School Programs: Helpful Hints for the Regular and Vision Teacher.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 10p.: Paper presented at the Annual International Convention of The Council for Exceptional Children (59th, New York, NY, April, 1981, Session W-73).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Organization; *Mainstreaming; Teacher Role; *Visual Impairments; *Visually Handicapped Mobility

ABSTRACT

The importance of visual orientation and mobility skill training for visually impaired students is emphasized, and suggestions are made for the vision teacher to involve the classroom teacher in providing a meaningful classroom environment for the mainstreamed student. Among strategies listed are keeping recognizable order to the location of desks, tables, and work stations; bringing the work closer to the child or the child closer to the work; ensuring good lighting, proper contrast, and reduction of glare; teaching sighted guide techniques to classmates; using a multisensory teaching approach; and teaching adapted playground and recess skills to visually impaired students. (CL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ED204955

PROVIDING ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY INSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC SCHOOL PROGRAMS: HELPFUL HINTS FOR THE REGULAR AND VISION TEACHER

William Henry Jacobson, M.Ed.
Assistant Professor, Orientation & Mobility
Department of Rehabilitation & Special Education
University of Arkansas at Little Rock
33rd and University Avenues
Little Rock, Arkansas 72204
April 15, 1981

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

William H. Jacobson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EC133526

The passage of Public Laws 93-380 and 94-142 has enabled handicapped children to receive special services in the least restrictive environment. Oftentimes this has meant the public school setting. While parents, special education teachers, and other lobbies demanded a free appropriate public education for all handicapped children, they presumed that the special needs of these children could be met through "related services," including physical and occupational therapy, psychology, speech pathology, audiology, and medical and counseling services. The legal guidelines implementing a free appropriate public education, therefore, require that many related services beyond the scope of traditional academic areas be made available.

One service not specifically mentioned but within the broad interpretation of related services is orientation and mobility for the visually impaired student. Students born with such an impairment need to receive input from the environment through their remaining senses. A newborn visually impaired child needs constant sensory stimulation to override what has been lost through the visual system. Without this stimulation certain critical stages of development will certainly be impaired (Fraiberg, 1977). While it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss in detail these developmental lags and how the orientation and mobility specialist intervenes to counteract the loss of vision in the growth process, it is necessary to understand that the role this professional may provide parents is multi-level in scope. While many states require that special children be identified so that proper services are provided, we as professionals know this does not always happen. Consequently, the orientation and mobility specialist can first act as a referral source if he is the initial contact person, can assess the visually impaired child's present level

of sensory and motor functioning, and can make recommendations to the parents for additional training and services. Second, if the child is referred back for additional mobility instruction, the specialist can work closely with the parents so they may follow up with instruction on a daily, even hourly basis. This is critical as the parents are the key to a constant flow of sensory input. The mobility specialist knows that he or she can only provide instruction for thirty minutes or so daily or weekly. The real training must take place through the parents. Consequently the parents must observe and be involved in the lessons. Third, the mobility specialist can provide materials and educational aids and show the parents how to use them. In addition, he or she can suggest activities and games to enhance the sensorimotor developmental process. Finally, the mobility specialist can act as a liaison between the family and the other support services.

As one can see the orientation and mobility specialist's role with the pre-academic visually impaired child can be an important one. If the child does not receive an organized sensory stimulation program during these years, then as he reaches school age he may be several years behind his peers in such gross motor activities as running, kicking, hopping, jumping, skipping and catching and throwing a ball, to name just a few. These developmental lags can severely restrict a child's play and social interaction with other children. If visually impaired children are going to be successfully integrated into the public schools as mandated by law, therefore, it is imperative that they receive the special service of the orientation and mobility specialist.

Smith (1978) surveyed public school programs nationwide to determine if orientation and mobility instruction was being provided; he found few school

systems taking advantage of this service. A recent follow-up indicates that while the situation is better, there still is much room for improvement (Smith, 1981).

While no one is sure of the impact of recent cuts in programs for the handicapped, it is evident that special related services will most likely bear the budgetary axe. It is more than likely, therefore, that no new job positions will be created in the next few years. Who then will provide these services? If they are not provided, can visually impaired children exist equally with their sighted peers?

More than likely the vision teacher will often be called upon to bear this responsibility. Unless one is dually certified, more than likely, he or she will have only had an introductory course in orientation and mobility. Probably such a course merely touched upon child growth and development and intervention strategies, and dealt more heavily on basic mobility skills, i.e., sighted guide, self-protection techniques, and rudimentary orientation skills. But such training is not comprehensive enough to provide for the total orientation and mobility needs of the visually impaired child. If the vision teacher, further more, is itinerant then the burden falls more heavily onto the regular classroom teacher. How can we then in these times maintain what little ground we have gained in providing a free appropriate public education for visually impaired students with the minimal resources available?

The vision teacher will have to take a more active role in advocating for comprehensive orientation and mobility services. We first must remember that such a specialized service is available and can be provided by a qualified professional. There are several ways to advocate financially for this service.

First, and most obvious, is to hire a full-time orientation and mobility specialist. Second, contract the service on a part-time or hourly basis. This can be accomplished directly with the specialist or through a rehabilitation agency. Either option can be done by an individual school district or from cooperative districts. A pooling of districts may be more cost effective for rural states and other areas where there are relatively few visually impaired students to warrant the hiring of a full-time specialist. A third option is to contact a university training program and develop student teaching and internship placements. Many programs could provide instruction throughout most of the academic year and possibly into the summer months.

Advocacy for professional orientation and mobility services is the primary aim for the vision teacher. However, this may not be possible even after all of the above options have been explored. The vision teacher will have to devise creative strategies to involve as many others as possible in the provision of basic mobility skills. Keep in mind the following:

1. Classroom teachers are an excellent resource if they are given adequate support and encouragement.
2. Students are also an invaluable resource if properly guided.

The following is a list of strategies that will help you involve the regular teacher in providing a meaningful classroom environment in terms of the orientation and mobility needs of the visually impaired child. One will note that these strategies employ a minimum of disruption to the normal routine, which is paramount to eliciting the regular classroom teacher's assistance. It is up to you!

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES

1. Rearranging the classroom is not usually necessary. As long as there is some recognizable order to the location of desks, tables, and work stations a visually impaired child can learn to move about safely and become familiar with the location of each.
   a. Try to keep these items in the same place for long periods of time so that the child can learn where they are.
   b. It is not necessary to keep the same locations for the entire school year but let the child know before hand when a change will take place, and then allow him to reorient himself accordingly.
   c. Encourage use of laterality and directionality in locating objects in space.
2. Work stations can be set up at strategic locations, i.e., at corners of the room, to allow for trailing walls and easier landmark identifications. If they have to be in the center of the room perhaps a mobile or chime could be hung to allow for tactual or auditory identification of the location. This will help instill the use of landmarks and reference points.
3. Bring the work closer to the child (reading) or the child closer to the work (i.e., board work). This is often an overlooked suggestion for a low vision child.
4. Good lighting, proper contrast, and reduction of glare are strategies that benefit all children.
5. Encourage the use of optical and non-optical aids.
6. Involve the teachers and other children in the understanding of visual impairment through inservices, assemblies, etc.

7. Teach sighted guide techniques to classmates and rotate the assignment of a sighted guide throughout the entire class during the school year.

8. Use a multisensory approach in teaching.

9. Encourage independent travel but not at the expense of practicality. If it is physically beyond the capacity of the student, for instance, to carry the food tray to his seat in the cafeteria then have a fellow classmate carry it and be a sighted guide as well. This promotes responsibility for the seeing student as well as understanding practical mobility problems for the visually impaired student.

10. Find out what games the other students are playing at recess and make sure the visually impaired child has the skills and adaptation techniques to play along. Then encourage play with the others.

    a. Play is an important aspect of school. It promotes social interaction as well as the obvious physical exercise and necessary burning of energy that all children require.

    b. This is an area sorely neglected in the public schools but vital to the physical growth of the child. It may mean giving up your free period to monitor what is happening on the playground. You may be surprised at what is not happening!

11. Be visible and available as often as possible. Your presence is reassuring, the class will get used to you being there, and you can observe what is going on with minimal disruption.

    a. Make sure your student is included in all activities and make the necessary adaptions.

    b. Don't do all of the work yourself; involve others.

12. Seek out assistance when in doubt. If you cannot hire a mobility specialist you can still discuss your problems with one and develop intervention strategies.

Orientation and mobility is a necessary service in the education of visually impaired children. It is extremely critical for those children receiving their education in the public schools. They must learn to interact socially, emotionally, as well as academically with their sighted peers. While Federal legislation has been enacted to ensure free appropriate education for all handicapped children, budgetary cutbacks are going to make it more difficult to comply with the laws. Stronger advocacy and creative techniques will have to be employed to ensure that orientation and mobility services, as well as other related services, will be provided to visually impaired children.

Bibliography

Fraiberg, S. Insights from the Blind. New York: Basic Books, 1977.

Smith, T.E.C.; Dickerson, L.R.; and Liska, J.S. Availability of Orientation and Mobility Services in Public Schools. Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness. 72. 5. 173-77.

Smith. T.E.C. Availability of Orientation and Mobility Services in the Public Schools: A Follow Up. A paper presented to the 59th Annual International C.E.C. Conference, New York City, April 15, 1981.